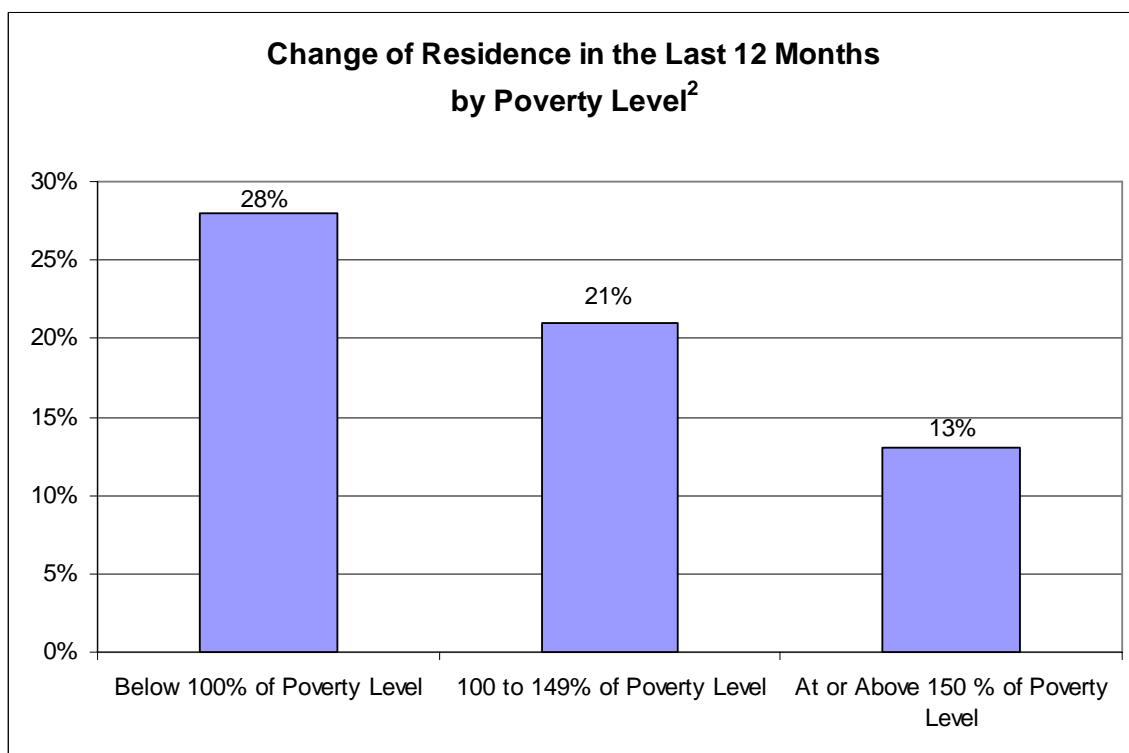


Educational Attainment and Income in Relation to Geographic Mobility

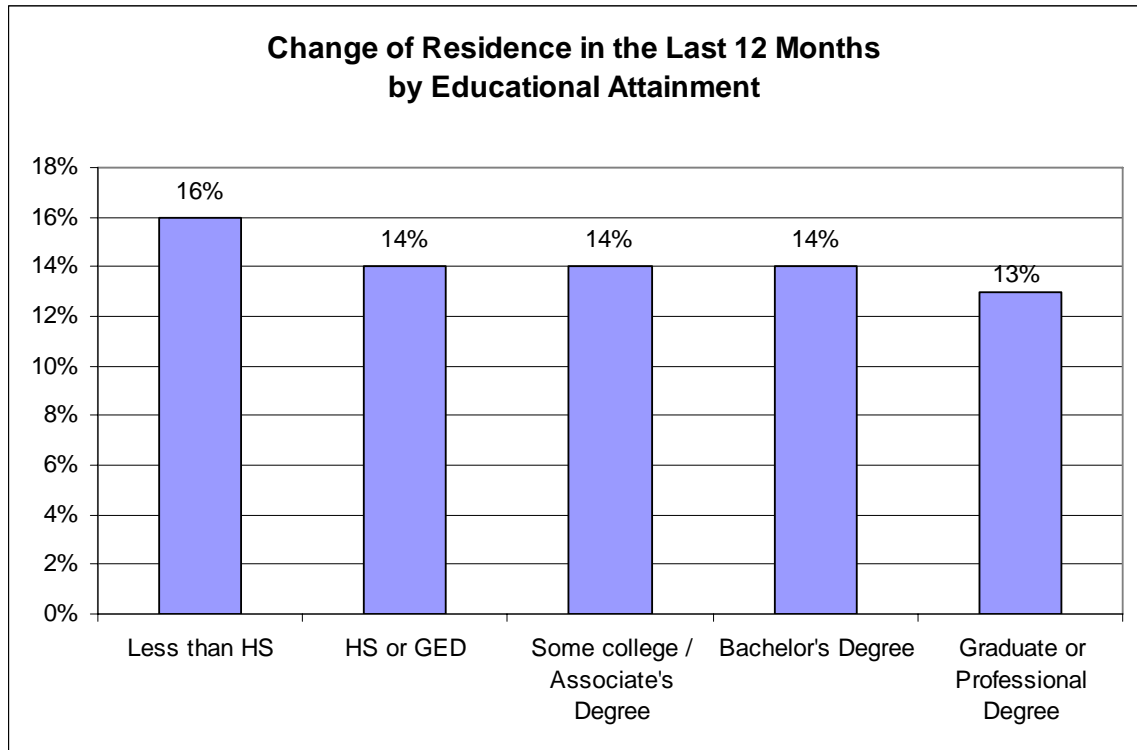
Data from the 2006 American Community Survey indicates that educational attainment and income expectations can be inversely related to mobility for children and adults¹. Adults who have attained lower levels of education can expect to earn less and relocate more frequently; their children are likely to change schools more frequently and to achieve less in school, and to complete less schooling overall than their less mobile peers. Charts 1 and 2 below describe mobility according to educational attainment level and poverty status.



While just over 28 percent of persons living below the poverty level reported that they had relocated at least once in the twelve months prior to the survey, this number shrank to just over 13 percent for persons living at or above 150 percent of the poverty level.

A 2006 study³ suggests that “economic insecurity is at the root of chronic residential movement among low income families.” This same study further suggests that “children may be particularly affected because of disrupted social and academic environments” and that there is a “clear relationship ... between educational attainment and economic stability later in life” (p. 227).

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While the percentages shown in Chart 2 initially appear to be quite similar across educational levels, a review of the literature indicates that the reasons for mobility are very different for less-educated vs. well-educated persons. One study⁴ indicates that more educated individuals are better able to respond to alternate labor market opportunities which yield greater rewards, and are more likely to be involved in regional or national labor markets rather than local labor markets, making them more responsive to a wider range of job opportunities across the geographic landscape. In short, less-educated persons tend to relocate due to “push” factors such as job loss or eviction, while well-educated persons tend to relocate due to “pull” factors such as employment advancement or more desirable housing.

A 2003 study⁵ outlines the many consequences of transience for the children of highly mobile persons, including disengagement in the classroom, loss of student records, and difficulty for their teachers in assessing appropriate grade or skill levels. A separate report⁶ describes the problem in terms of nationwide education initiatives such as No Child Left Behind, pointing out that “if the poor performance of transient students drags down [schools with highly mobile student populations] an otherwise competent school could be shut down” (p.24).

What does it all mean? Mobility may be perceived as a positive thing when it is a matter of choice (pull factors) rather than a matter of necessity (push factors). Higher levels of educational attainment result in more choices and opportunities for individuals and their families.

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Sources:

¹Geographic Mobility by Selected Characteristics (2006). American Community Survey. Available online at <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

²United States Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines available online at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/figures-fed-reg.shtml>

³ Schafft, K. (2006). Poverty, residential mobility, and student transiency within a rural New York school district. *Rural Sociology*, 71(2), 212-231.

⁴ Saenz, R., & Cready, C. M. (2004). The role of human and social capital in the geographic mobility and annual earnings among Mexican immigrants. *The Journal of Latino-Latin American Studies*, 1, 3. p.1-32.

⁵ Sanderson, D. (2003). Engaging highly transient students. *Education*, 123(3), 600.

⁶ Hall, T. (2001). Student movement. *Washington Monthly*, 33(9), 23-25.